



# State of Utah Department of Commerce

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PRESS RELEASE  
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## **Long Distance Scams Hit Through E-mail**

It might come as an “urgent” message on your answering machine, or an e-mail message about a “prize,” or “order ready for delivery, or as a long-distance message on your pager. Any of them could turn out to be an expensive telephone trap.

Across Utah and from coast to coast, consumers are getting stung by cryptic telephone, email and pager messages urging them to call a number for information about injured or sick relatives, “prize opportunities” or “debt collectors.” The messages tell recipients to call a long-distance number for more information. In many cases, what looks like a three-digit domestic area code, is in reality the number for an international pay-per-call line.

“The latest version we are seeing looks like someone is sending you an e-mail order verification,” says Francine Giani, Director of the Utah Division of Consumer Protection. “The message tells you that the order will be shipped unless canceled. You call, spend a couple of minutes on hold, a couple more canceling the order, and think nothing more of it. You won’t realize you have been victimized until you receive your phone bill with some huge charge for international calling.”

Giani adds that e-mail is becoming a preferred tool for scam artists because it is cheap and easy to send out thousands or hundreds of thousands of messages.

“Always be suspicious of e-mail from people you don’t know or never have sent a message to, Giani says. “And be even more suspicious if it is coming to you as a blind copy.”

Concerned or curious consumers who take the bait and place the return call usually are kept on the line, listening to long-winded messages. As the clock ticks, the charges build, and scam artists are counting the rebates they’ll receive from foreign telephone companies. For every minute you stay on the line, the scam artist collects a bigger share of profits.

It’s not always easy to distinguish an international dialing code from a North American area code. Some places outside the United States or Canada, such as in the Caribbean, can be reached simply by dialing a number beginning with three digits that resemble a regular area code. Many scam artists take advantage of this situation, and of unsuspecting consumers, by urging them to call numbers without revealing that these calls result in international long distance charges that could be costly. Because each country establishes its own telephone rates, there is no limit to the per-minute charge for these calls.

The Utah Division of Consumer Protection reminds consumers to be suspicious of unidentified telephone, e-mail, or pager messages that claim to offer information about a sick or injured relative, a debt, bad credit, or prize offer. In addition, consumers should be wary of messages from unfamiliar sources. Finally, Consumer Protection suggests that consumers question any company that offers products, services or investment opportunities through telephone numbers that start with these area codes:

Area Code/Location

264 Anguilla  
268 Antigua and Barbuda  
242 Bahamas  
246 Barbados  
441 Bermuda  
284 British Virgin Islands  
245 Cayman Islands  
767 Dominica  
473 Grenada  
876 Jamaica  
664 Montserrat  
869 St. Kitts and Nevis  
758 St. Lucia  
784 St. Vincent] Grenadines  
868 Trinidad and Tobago  
809 Dominican Republic